

MARCH 15, 1967

PIE DUFOUR'S *A La Mode*

Garrison Probe Ranks with Top Conversation Pieces of History

There can be little doubt that the Garrison investigation has provided New Orleans with one of its greatest conversation pieces in its history.

Leaving out such events shared with the rest of the country as the Armistice in 1918 or Pearl Harbor or VJ Day and concentrating on events centered in New Orleans, very few incidents have seized public interest — and concern — over the years as has the district attorney's startling probe.

I would hazard the guess, without being able to prove it, that only four or five local events in more than 100 years commanded the public attention to a similar degree.

If one could turn the clock back to 1862, as Flag Officer David G. Farragut prepared to launch his Union naval attack on New Orleans, he would find himself in a city in the grip of excitement. This excitement grew into anxiety as Forts Jackson and St. Philip came under direct attack in April and when word reached the city that Farragut's fleet had passed the forts, panic took over. But during the days before disaster the single topic of conversation in New Orleans must have been built around the burning question: "Will the forts stop Farragut?"

A dozen years later, in 1874, New Orleans had another incident that captured popular attention and which doubtless was discussed over and over on the street, in offices, over coffee, in the homes, just as the Garrison bombshell has been discussed here in recent weeks.

This incident, of course, was the defeat by the White Leaguers of the Metropolitan Police of the Carpetbaggers in the pitched battle on Sept. 14 at the foot of Canal st.

Another sizzling conversation piece was the famous disputed election of 1876, when Louisiana had two rival governors and governments, the Democratic regime of Francis T. Nicholls and the Republican regime of S. B. Packard and two electoral college returns, one for the Democrat Tilden and the other for the Republican Hayes in the disputed presidential



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election. Surely New Orleans hummed and buzzed with charges, rumors, comments, even as today with the Garrison operation.

I doubt if public interest, curiosity or concern was aroused to such an extent again until the Mafia killing of Chief of Police Dave Hennessey in October, 1890. This was followed by a trial and the lynching of 11 Italians by a mob headed by leading citizens of New Orleans who felt justice had gone astray.

In trying to dip back into the past for events that must have set New Orleans agog with talk and excitement, I can't think of anything to match the Garrison investigation in my experience, the cumulative activities of Earl Long, excepted. Back into the 1920s a cause celebre in music and social spheres of New Orleans came when a group of ladies, sponsoring a fund for rebuilding the Old French Opera House, brought suit against the late Robert Hayne Tarrant, then a dashing impressario, to account for several thousand dollars raised at a benefit which he had produced for the ladies. The case was followed closely by many, for it had opera buffe aspects, but certainly it didn't cut across all social and economic lines as does the Garrison affair.